

# PEOPLE & THINGS

**A**N armistice seems to have been declared between the Automobile Association and its critics. Many members approved of the recent inquiry into the workings and finances of this rich and ponderous organisation and hope that under the inspiring presidency of the Duke of Edinburgh the A.A. will be awakened from a stupor which has doubtless been engendered by forty years of carbon-monoxide poisoning.

Before next spring they should certainly see to the better editing of their Foreign Route guides, which have hardly altered in appearance and content in the last twenty-five years. Their routing is generally excellent, but their comments on the architectural and scenic beauties of foreign countries are of a lamentable paucity and banality. "A fast undulating road" is all you get when traversing a stretch of France soaked in historical and romantic associations. Art and literature are scarcely mentioned and gastronomy is taboo.

The A.A. foreign town apparently consists almost exclusively of churches, thanks no doubt to the guidance of the late Rev. Canon F. W. Hassard-Short, M.A. who until early last year was Chairman of the Association, Chairman of its Finance Committee and a member of the General Committee.

## Pray Action

**T**HE A.A. would benefit greatly by the appointment of a select editorial working party charged with infusing vitality and an ounce of culture into the content and appearance of some of their publications.

How splendid it would be to start for Monte Carlo with an A.A. route map with logistics by Elizabeth Nicholas, history and art by Raymond Mortimer, gastronomy and literary associations by Cyril Connolly, and a map drawn by Bip Pares.

And, by the way, when is the A.A. going to pluck up its courage and issue an annual gastronomic guide to Great Britain? The coffers of the A.A. are bulging with gold. The Association should spend a minute fraction of its profits on giving its 1,400,000 members happier holidays.

## For White, Read Black

**I**T is not surprising that all owners of the 1950 Soviet Encyclopaedia have been instructed to cut out and burn the two pages on Beria, for he is there described as "one of the outstanding leaders of the Soviet Communist Party and Government." That diligent analyst of the Russian scene, Michael Padev, tells me that the following description of Beria is now the authorised version:

"Base renegade, vile enemy, accused enemy, contemptible traitor and adventurer, bandit, contemptible and cunning traitor, wicked traitor, base traitor, evil enemy, bourgeois degenerate, imperialist agent, mad dog, skilled provocateur, ideological hireling, career faker, thrice accused Judas."

By **ATTICUS**



## The First Snowdrop

**I** HAD always supposed that February 14 was the birthday of the snowdrop but I learn from Colonel P. C. Stern, who is to snowdrops what Mr. Allwood is to carnations and Mr. Russell was to the lupin, that there are in fact sixteen varieties of snowdrop and that they flower between October and March. Colonel Stern grows all the species in his famous garden at Highdown near Worthing, and under the title "Snowdrops and Snowflakes" the Royal Horticultural Society will shortly publish his definitive book on the snowdrop family.

Colonel E. A. Bowles, vice-president of the society, has supplied the charming water-colours for the book and the one I reproduce above shows "Rachela", named after the daughter of Professor Mahaffy who collected it on the slopes of Mount Hymettus in 1884. All its English descendants are from his single bulb and they have the distinction of opening the snowdrop season each October.

## Vandal-fodder

**I**T is a shame that barbarians amongst us have effectively killed the traditional feature of the Chelsea Arts Ball—the ornamental floats which gave so much pleasure to a host of art students and to the general public. The somewhat similar pageantry of the main hall design of the Daily Mail Ideal Homes Exhibition is fortunately protected from hooliganism by being suspended from the ceiling of Olympia, otherwise its life might also be short.

This year the mouths of the vandals will water as they gaze up at the design by Sir Hugh Casson in collaboration with Robin and Christopher Inroside. The display is to be Arcadian, the principal feature being an ornamental grotto whence Phoebus, having "watered his steeds," rises in his chariot into the sky. I believe the idea came from the Ironsides, whose work is becoming known all over the world. Their large heraldic screen for the Coronation display in Whitehall is now in Australia where it forms part of the decorations to celebrate the Queen's visit. In America, the décor and costumes designed by Robin Inroside for the Sadler's Wells Ballet, Sylvia, now on tour, were so much

admired that he is to hold a one-man exhibition of his work in New York this spring.

## The Cousteau Saga

**C**OMMANDER COUSTEAU, the famous underwater explorer, has just sailed from Marseilles after having been delayed by a fire in the bilge which destroyed the control panel of his research vessel Calypso. This year he has a packed and thrilling programme beginning with a visit to the Red Sea where, with Marcel Ichac, who directed "Annapurna," he is co-directing an underwater CinemaScope film. Then to the Persian Gulf to carry out an underwater survey in search of offshore oil, under contract to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

In May he takes the Calypso to Karachi and Bombay and then south to the Laccadive and Maldiva Islands and thence below the Equator to the remote Chagos Islands. In the summer he returns to the Aegean where he is going to examine a number of promising wrecks among the Cyclades with the help of a specially-designed suction pump. Then to his base at Marseilles to refit and probably sail next winter for his long-deferred marine biological survey of the Sargasso Sea.

All last year work had been proceeding on the 2,000-year-old sunken galley near Marseilles described in THE SUNDAY TIMES last spring. By Christmas 3,500 wine jars had been brought to the surface, but no objects of intrinsic or artistic value. His second team will continue raising the galley and its contents all through this year.

## Lady MacCarthy

**T**HERE was a tendency among people who did not know her well to regard the late Lady MacCarthy merely as the wife of Sir Desmond MacCarthy. That she certainly was; she guarded him with loving care; often when he was unwell towards the close of his life, she herself, fragile, deaf but indomitable, would bring to this office the weekly articles which were so long a feature of THE SUNDAY TIMES.

But she herself was a friend and patron of many young writers in the twenties and thirties, and very much a wit and personality in her own right. She wrote four distinguished books, although her own abilities were kept in the background by her zeal in promoting her husband's writing. And she was the moving spirit behind two of his most successful volumes of essays which came out last year.

Sir Desmond himself was always the first to acknowledge her talents. At a family luncheon party in their flat at Garrick's Villa at Hampton Court, not long before his death, when the subject of her writing cropped up he turned to her, chuckling with pleasure, and said: "Yes, Molly, you must write more—you know I have always wanted to be Mr. Henry Wood."

## A New Magazine

**I**T is the duty of all who take pleasure from literature to buy the first copy of every new literary magazine, but it is the editor's duty to make them read what they have bought and then order the next copy. I have caught an under-the-counter glimpse of the long-awaited monthly review "The London Magazine," edited by John Lehmann for its "angel" the Daily Mirror Newspapers, which is to be published next week. Because of the contributions by William Plomer, Elizabeth Bowen and Huxley Charteris I shall certainly buy the second number.